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ABSTRACT

This paper is a sequel to the paper titled "The Role of Parents as Educational and Social Partners of the School in the Czech Republic: Legislation and Media Analysis." This paper presents the results of the second stage of a 3-year study that sought to learn how the schools perceive parents. This segment of the study looked at four possible roles: (1) parents as a problem, the traditional view; (2) parents as clients or customers served by teacher-experts; (3) parents as partners who share a sense of purpose, mutual respect, and willingness to take action; and (4) parents as citizens who claim their rights and accept their responsibilities. The study was theoretically grounded in concrete patterns of relationships between the family and the school as described in relevant literature. Data were gathered from a survey of administrators, teachers, and parents at selected Czech schools. The question of what role is ascribed to Czech parents in relation to the schools is clear: the role of client or customer, particularly in secondary schools and more so in larger towns--where parents are free to choose a school--than in smaller villages. (Contains 6 tables and 11 references.) (WFA)

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The Role of Parents in Relation to School: Case of the Czech Republic[1]

ECER 2002, Lisboa
Network No. 14 – Communities and their Schools

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Abstract:

This paper is a sequel to a paper presented at ECER 2001 within the Network No. 14 under the title *The Role of Parents as Educational and Social Partners of the School in the Czech Republic: Legislation and Media Analysis*. The current paper presents results of the second stage of our three-year research project. The research questions are as follows: What does the school consider parents to be and what is their position? To what extent are they seen as a problem, as clients, partners or citizens? What role do parents ascribe to themselves in the relationship to school? Are there any differences in terms of the parents' roles according to the type of school or countryside/urban area? Answers to the research questions are sought by means of a survey carried out among directors, teachers and parents of selected Czech schools. Results are confronted with our earlier findings and with relevant theoretical framework.

[1] The article represents one of the outcomes of a research project "The Role of Parents as Educational and Social Partners of the School" which was supported by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic, no. 406/01/1077.

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I. The Role of Parents in Relation to School

This study deals with the role assumed by parents in relation to the schools in which their children study. It explores how parents are perceived by the school, or rather by its representatives, as well as how parents perceive their own role. The study is theoretically grounded in concrete patterns of relationships between the family and the school as described in relevant literature, especially that which is written in English. Initially, three basic approaches towards parents have been identified: parents as a problem, parents as clients, and parents as partners (Docking, 1990). Influenced by Vincent (2000), we may also add a civic approach: parents as citizens. The theoretical concepts of parents as "problems", as "clients" (customers), "partners", or "citizens" in relation to the school assume highly concrete forms in practice. These include the school's communication with parents and the support with which it provides them, the parents' involvement in school activities, and the parents' rights. The characteristics of the four approaches, as they are described in literature, have served us as a basis for the construction of indicators that have been then transformed into questionnaire items. The questionnaires were distributed to representatives (directors) of schools, as well as parents.

The following sections summarise the basic characteristics of individual parental roles in relation to the school, as well as indicators that are derived from these characteristics for the purposes of this research.

Parents as a problem:

This approach represents a traditional and experienced-based attitude towards the parents typical of the initial evolutionary stages of the relationship between the school and parents. However, this does not mean that this attitude is non-existent at present. Basically, three forms can be distinguished. Firstly, the attitude applies to a category of parents that can be labelled as "**independent**". Independent parents prefer to keep minimum contact with their children's schools. They rarely communicate with teachers and have a rather casual interest in their children's study results. These parents' values may differ from those transmitted by the school and thus, though tolerant, such parents do not feel much need to co-operate actively with the school. They are usually concerned only with their children's well-being and the healthy development of their individuality. For this purpose, they also seek alternative educational opportunities for their children, as well as extracurricular activities and extra tutoring. These parents fulfil their parental obligations only to the limit that they set themselves. In fact, these parents would not necessarily have to be a problem for the school, if the school was not obliged to document its contacts with them (Vincent, 2000).

The second category can be labelled as "**bad**" parents[2]. Generally, these parents show no interest in their children's education and do not encourage their learning. They make little effort to inquire about the school's educational methods and pedagogical goals. They give the impression of neither accepting and nor supporting the school and its values. Some of them simply ignore it. This category includes families living on the margins of society, parents who cope with personal problems (alcoholics, workaholics, sick people, etc.), and families that come from a different cultural background. These parents often fail in their parental duties even within the family. Even parents who are unable to adequately express their interest or who are

[2] We are aware of this label's negative connotations and we only use it as a metaphor in the context of our study.

embarrassed to ask about things that are not clear to them, i.e. parents who lack necessary social competencies, can be labelled as bad in this context (Mebus, 1995).

On the other hand, parents who are too "**eager**" can constitute a problem for the school as well. They make an effort to communicate, they partake in meetings, assist their children with homework, and openly support the teachers and the school. Teachers can feel their positions as educational experts to be endangered by such parents. These parents demand clear reports about their children's progress, explicit descriptions of the teachers' pedagogical approaches, educational counselling etc.[3], and all this in a language that is intelligible to the parents. The time consumption of such communication constitutes yet another source of difficulties. This perception of the situation is further reinforced by a certain ambiguity about the parents' right to demand information about both the children's progress and the development of the school as an institution. Active parents may sometimes be suspected of trying to gain advantages or control over the school (Cullingford, 1996, Thomas, 1996).

Indicators

Parents as a problem – "independent" parents:

- do not make effort to maintain communication with the school.
- believe that extracurricular activities are more important for their children than academic homework.
- believe that the family has greater influence on the child's educational progress than the school.

Parents as a problem – "bad" parents:

- take no interest in their children's school results.
- take no interest in their children's behaviour at school.
- ignore the school's appeals to assist their children with homework and preparation for school.

Parents as a problem – "eager" parents:

- provide the children with too much assistance with school duties (e.g. writing homework).
- busy teachers and the school's management with trifles.
- overly criticise the performance of teachers and the school's management.

Parents as customers (clients):

The customer model of parental roles views parents from two possible perspectives. Firstly, **the school and the teachers are experts** on the services they provide and know best how to do their job, how to attract "customers", and how to treat them. Second, **parents are experts** on the education of their own children and thus know best what services (schools) and educational methods they need.

[3] Some inquiries of this sort may be perceived as an impeachment of the teachers' work.

The school's attitude usually depends on two conditions: accepting the parents as the most important persons in the children's lives and having the willingness to subject the school's work to the criticism and requirements expressed by the parents. The school's administrators must be willing to respond to criticism and accommodate the parents' demands, and they must be able to clearly formulate and defend their work and performance.

Generally speaking, parents are entitled to choose from the following possible forms of participation: (1) active involvement in the school's management and direct control over the school's development, (2) expression of their needs and demands as the rank-and-file parents (or members of boards of parents), or (3) acceptance of whatever is offered to them, showing loyalty and entrusting themselves to experts. The parents also have the additional possibility of enrolling their child in a different school.

The central mechanism of this concept is the parents' free choice of a school. The schools are forced to compete with one another, which puts pressure on them to continually improve their study (and thus the children's) results and to innovate in the curriculum as well as in the choice of extracurricular activities and other services.[4] The free choice of a school and the introduction of a "consumer culture" into the school environment is expected to bring about greater co-operation between the parents and the schools through the parents' possibility to influence the quality of services they "buy". This assumption is, however, somewhat problematic because the "customer" has the right to voice their claims and that of not expressing them at all. The parents thus take into consideration their time limitations as well as their readiness to push their claims through.[5] In addition, the parents might not always feel comfortable in the role of "supervisors". They are often aware of their limited understanding of all the internal processes that take place within the school and therefore they tend to regard the teachers as professionals whose work should not be interfered with (Allen, 1992, Cullingford, 1996).

Indicators

Parents as „customers (clients)":

- purposely choose the particular school for their child.
- want the management to hire the best-qualified teachers.
- insist that the school is obliged to provide them with information.

Parents as partners:

Today, "partnership" is the most frequently used expression when it comes to the relationship between the school and parents. Partnership offers equality to both parties and mutual recognition of the partner's contribution to the child's progress. The teachers strive to suppress their roles as experts and to welcome the parents' views as an enrichment of their work. Parents,

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[4] This pressure does not necessarily yield positive outcomes. In England, for example, parents started to perceive the ranking of a school in a national testing, with ranking of the pupils' study results, as the principal indicator of the school's quality. The schools responded by laying more emphasis on academic knowledge of the pupils, a trend which is perceived as negative by a majority of teachers. This also forces the schools to orient themselves towards certain specific groups of pupils who can be expected to prosper well and succeed. The schools also return to a certain traditionalism, for instance by re-introducing school uniforms, emphasising discipline, etc. (Vincent, 2000).

[5] A single voice is not enough to enforce the parents' claims. A collective action is usually necessary, which the parents might not find easy to organise.

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regardless of how little professional training they might have had, are experienced educators who know their children best, which makes their opinion valuable.

The assumed equality in this relationship is sometimes questioned, of course. Nonetheless, Bastiani (1993) offers such a concept of partnership where elements of reciprocity can be identified: shared (though unequally) power, responsibility and ownership; reciprocity that begins with listening to each other, involves a sensitive dialogue and a give and take on both sides, shared goals based on shared values, recognition of important differences between the partners, and commitment to joint action through which the parents, the pupils, and the experts strive after a common goal.

Pugh (1989) defines this relationship as a work relationship characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and willingness to take action. This implies sharing information, skills, responsibilities and decision-making, as well as accountability to each other.

Parents may assume the role of the school's **educational partners**: individuals or groups acting in the interest of the care for children, their upbringing, and their education. They may also assume the role of **social partners**: individuals or groups who establish relationships with the school in the interest of the development of the school as an institution. In both cases, the parents' prime goal is to facilitate their children's progress. The difference thus consists in the methods they choose to achieve this goal.

Indicators

Parents as educational partners:

- like to exchange information with teachers about their child's personality, behaviour, and the best way to approach him/her.
- facilitate the child's school performance (give advice, create good conditions for study, etc.).
- are willing to help their child's classes (e.g. partake in the organisation of class activities, sponsor activities financially).

Parents as social partners:

- try to influence important decisions concerning the school (e.g. merging classes together, investments in equipment).
- get involved in formal parental networks at the school (e.g. boards of parents, the school's councils).
- act in the interest of the school wherever it can be of benefit to the school (e.g. in local authorities, local press, in their social circles).

Parents as citizens:

In addition to the well-established approaches described above, new opinions emerged in the nineties which assign parents the role of **citizens** in relation to the school (Böhm, 1994, Vincent, 2000). Generally speaking, the relationship is compared to a typical relationship between the citizens and state institutions, where parents as citizens claim their rights and accept their obligations in relation to the school. It is necessary to differentiate between those who claim individual rights and those who claim collective rights.

The parents' claims are conditioned by their own activity. Attention is therefore drawn not only to legislative conditions, but also to the quality of civic society in individual countries. At the least, citizens can get involved at two basic levels: they can enter public politics and they can engage in the development of local communities and voluntary activities. Here, the citizen's individual responsibility for the local community and the principle of "voluntary work" are emphasised.

As has already been mentioned, the cogitation about parents in relation to the school proceeds from the idea of civic participation at various levels. The quality of "citizenship" in a given society, how it is perceived, and what conditions have been created for civic involvement are therefore of great importance.

It is obvious that this last model of the relationship between parents and the school contains simultaneously many potentially strong points and a number of obstacles. In fact, each of the previously described approaches is in some sense reflected in the civic approach. It makes sense when we remember that parents continue to be citizens regardless of whether their relationship towards the school is client- (customer) or partner-like. Out of all the approaches, the civic approach is also least specified in terms of concrete relationships, such as in co-operation between the family and the school.

Indicators:

Parents as citizens:

- will be interested in the school even after their child completes his/her education.
- would appreciate if the school served also served purposes other than mere education of children (e.g. educational courses for adults, counselling for parents).
- emphasise the importance of civic education at school.

II. Research methodology

For each of the parental roles – parents as a problem (independent, "bad", eager), parents as customers, parents as partners (educational, social) and parents as citizens – three indicators were constructed. The resulting 21 indicators were then operationalised into a set of 21 questionnaire items. The items were introduced by a sentence: "Parents can establish a variety of relationships with the school. Try to estimate the proportion of the parents at your school (your child's school) who can be characterised by the following phrase...." Respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of parents (on the scale 0 % – 10 % – 25 % – 50 % – 75 % – 90 % – 100 %) to whom each of the statements was applicable.

The following table 1 gives an overview of the indicators' inner validity. As is evident from the table, we may identify such indicators of parental roles which are consistent with one another and do not contradict each other. This is most apparent in the case of indicators of parents labelled as problematic - "bad" (C7 – C9). On the contrary, indicators of the civic parental role have the lowest inner validity (C19 – C21). We admit that this reflects our own doubts about the choice of indicators for parents–citizens. As has already been mentioned, the doubts arise from the fact that the approach to parents as citizens is described rather vaguely in literature.

Table 1: Correlation matrix of indicators of parent's roles

	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	C11	C12	C13	C14	C15	C16	C17	C18	C19	C20	C21
C1	1,00																				
C2	0,27	1,00																			
C3	0,18	0,28	1,00																		
C4	0,07	-0,07	-0,04	1,00																	
C5	0,12	-0,02	-0,02	0,27	1,00																
C6	0,04	-0,03	0,07	0,29	0,25	1,00															
C7	-0,01	-0,15	-0,04	0,43	0,22	0,30	1,00														
C8	-0,09	-0,23	-0,12	0,30	0,23	0,24	0,65	1,00													
C9	-0,11	-0,16	-0,07	0,25	0,18	0,17	0,51	0,64	1,00												
C10	0,02	0,00	0,09	0,14	0,23	0,27	0,25	0,16	0,22	1,00											
C11	0,09	0,05	0,15	0,20	0,20	0,28	0,15	0,04	0,05	0,39	1,00										
C12	-0,11	-0,02	0,07	0,12	0,12	0,14	0,24	0,23	0,24	0,32	0,31	1,00									
C13	0,16	0,23	0,22	-0,13	0,02	-0,03	-0,21	-0,28	-0,23	-0,02	0,05	-0,17	1,00								
C14	0,16	0,26	0,25	-0,25	-0,09	-0,08	-0,34	-0,38	-0,29	-0,05	0,07	-0,15	0,48	1,00							
C15	0,22	0,17	0,13	-0,08	0,11	0,07	-0,13	-0,22	-0,19	0,01	0,12	-0,12	0,32	0,41	1,00						
C16	0,13	0,16	0,22	-0,12	0,09	0,10	-0,08	-0,11	-0,03	0,12	0,20	0,03	0,24	0,29	0,35	1,00					
C17	0,12	0,15	0,15	0,01	0,03	0,03	-0,06	-0,15	-0,16	0,07	0,06	-0,04	0,19	0,22	0,31	0,33	1,00				
C18	0,22	0,19	0,13	-0,05	0,03	0,00	-0,14	-0,19	-0,13	0,02	0,15	-0,07	0,26	0,35	0,36	0,37	0,45	1,00			
C19	0,16	0,17	0,03	-0,10	[illegible]	-0,03	-0,21	-0,21	-0,16	0,03	0,13	-0,11	0,19	0,23	0,28	0,32	0,30	0,50	1,00		
C20	0,01	0,10	0,16	-0,03	[illegible]	0,01	-0,05	-0,06	-0,02	-0,03	0,12	0,02	0,13	0,17	0,21	0,23	0,13	0,28	0,19	1,00	
C21	0,23	0,09	0,13	0,04	[illegible]	0,18	-0,00	-0,08	-0,07	0,04	0,13	-0,09	0,23	0,27	0,41	0,19	0,19	0,33	0,22	0,29	1,00

Legend: C1 – C3: Parents as „customers", C4 – 6: Parents as a problem – "independent" parents, C7 – C9: Parents as a problem – "bad" parents, C10 – C12: Parents as a problem – "eager" parents, C13 – C15: Parents as educational partners, C16 – C18: Parents as social partners, C19 – C21: Parents as citizens.

Note: N = 458. Marked correlations are significant at the 0,05 level.

The questions relating to parental roles in relation to the school were part of a broader anonymous[6] questionnaire. Six comparable versions of the questionnaire were intended for the directors (representatives of the school) and parents with children at the kindergarten level (pre-primary level), primary school level (primary level) and basic school level (lower secondary level).

Research sample:

The research sample was obtained by an anonymous selection from a total of 10,924 schools, of which 6,695 were kindergartens, 1,697 were primary schools, and 2,532 were basic schools. In order to be able to identify the differences between schools in bigger towns and smaller villages, we decided to distribute the questionnaires separately to schools in localities with over 20,000 inhabitants (hereafter referred to as "town" schools) and those with 500 - 5,000 inhabitants[7] (hereafter referred to as "country" schools).

[6] For the purposes of statistical analysis (in the Statistica program), the questionnaires contain codes which indicate the size of locality, the type of school and the concrete school.

[7] We assume that there is only one school in each of these localities.

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In total, 1,800 questionnaires were distributed by mail to 900 schools[8]. In an accompanying letter, the directors were asked to fill in the questionnaire and to pass on the enclosed parental questionnaire, accompanied with instructions and a post-free reply envelope, to parents of an arbitrary pupil from their school. Let us assume that 900 parents were addressed in this way. Because of the Czech law on personal data protection, we were not able to obtain the parents' addresses. Addressing them through the schools' directors thus seemed the only plausible method. We are, of course, aware of the possibility that this might bring about a certain bias in the obtained data.

Data collection and the return rate:

The questionnaires were distributed in May 2002, preceded by a pilot study. The total return rate was 30%, or 571 questionnaires[9]. It slightly differed according to the type of school, size of locality, and questionnaire version (directors vs. parents). The following table (2) shows the return rate for individual versions of the questionnaire together with basic distribution of the sample.

Table 2: Return rate by questionnaire version

			No.	%
Parents	Primary school	Countryside	44	27
		Towns	54	33
	Basic school	Countryside	41	25
		Towns	43	26
	Kindergarten	Countryside	39	26
		Towns	51	34
Directors	Primary school	Countryside	48	28
		Towns	57	35
	Basic school	Countryside	54	34
		Towns	40	24
	Kindergarten	Countryside	44	29
		Towns	56	37
ALL TOGETHER			**571**	**30**
ONLY PARENTS			272	29
ONLY DIRECTORS			299	31

[8] Of which: kindergartens - town (150), kindergartens - country (150), primary level - town (150), primary level - country (150), lower secondary level - town (150), lower secondary level - country (150).

[9] In addition to direct mailing, the questionnaires were also distributed by e-mail. However, the return rate was very low (6%) in this case.

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III. Research results and interpretation

General values of the role indexes:

After the inner validity of the triads of indicators for individual parental roles was verified, corresponding indexes were constructed. Each "role index" corresponds to the average percentage value of the three relevant indicators (which range between 0% and 100%). The indexes were then used in further statistical operations and interpretations of the results.

Out of the four basic models of the parental role in relation to the school, the customer approach is in an overwhelming majority. It corresponds to a total of 82% of responses, regardless of whether the questionnaires were completed by the directors or the parents. Judging from the respondents' statements, this means that the parent-customers are the group most typically to be seen in the Czech school environment. It is those parents who make the effort to carefully choose a school for their children, demand the best-qualified teachers to teach their children, and insist that the school provides them with necessary information. It appears that both the representatives of schools and the parents emphasise that both parties should fulfil their duties and keep the other party informed, as is required by the customer principle.

Second most frequent was the partner model (38%), followed by the model of parents as a problem (22%). The approach to parents as citizens is least frequent (18%).

When we look at the more detailed divisions within the category of parents as partners, at the models of educational and social partners, we can see that the former is clearly predominant. While the average proportion of parents who, in the respondents' opinion, match the characteristics of educational partners is 53%, only 23% of the parents were described as social partners by the respondents. Social partnership, which can be characterised by a certain "social interest", an interest which transcends purely individual dimension and aspires to participation in decision-making and active involvement in joint action in the interest of the school as a whole, is a rather marginal phenomenon at Czech schools. This can probably be attributed to the fact that the Czechs, affected by the heritage from real socialism, are not much used to active involvement in public matters.

A more detailed analysis of individual indicators that compose the index of parents as social partners reveals the weakest point. It is the indicator for "tries to influence important decisions concerning the school" (C16) with an average value of 18%. The other two indicators (C17 – involvement in formal parental networks, and C18 – acting in the interest of the school) amount to 25%, on the average.

Similarly, individual indicators composing the index of problematic parents can be analysed. It is interesting to note that it is not the parents who can be labelled as bad (19%) that are perceived as "problematic", but those who show signs of independence (30%). In other words, it seems that parents who tend to underestimate the importance of the school and prefer to take their children's development into their own hands constitute a bigger problem for the school than parents who take no interest whatsoever in their children's school results. It might be good news that the category of eager parents makes for the smallest proportion in the index of problematic parents (16%).

Differences in the values of role indexes between schools' representatives and parents:

The previous section described the general distribution of role indexes values, without reflecting the differences between the opinions of the parents and the school. However, our data make it possible to compare these views and identify possible variance. The following table (3) brings necessary data.

Table 3: The roles of parents in a view of school representatives and parents

	School representatives		*Parents' representatives*	
Parents' role	N	Mean (%)	N	Mean (%)
Customer (Client)	283	80	250	79
Problem (all together)	283	22	250	22
Problem – "independent"	283	30	250	29
Problem – "bad"	282	20	248	18
Problem – "eager"	282	15	248	16
Partner (all together)	282	37	249	39
Partner educational	282	51	249	54
Partner social	282	23	249	23
Citizen	281	17	249	20

As is evident from the table there are no significant differences between the parents' and the directors' perception of the parental role. Only slightly more often do the parents perceive themselves as educational partners of the school and as citizens. We admit that this is a rather surprising finding because we expected to observe clear differences in the views of parents and the school. There are two possible explanations: either our finding truly reflects reality, and then there is no reason for alarm (on the contrary, it would be a good start for the development of co-operation between both parties), or the result can be attributed to the methodological approach we chose: we did not address parents directly, but through the schools' directors.[10]

Differences in the values of role indexes according to the type of school:

From the very beginning, our cogitation about the relationship between the school and parents reflected the possible interfering factors as well. Our earlier research shows that communication, openness, helpfulness, and mutual expectations between teachers and parents change with the child's age, or, in other words, with the child's year of schooling. In the initial years of the child's schooling, communication is more satisfactory, but as the child proceeds to higher school grades, communication gets more and more complicated and the relationship grows colder. Therefore we had special interest in exploring whether this is in some way reflected in the opinions of the parental role. We proceeded from the assumption that opinions on parents in

[10] As was mentioned in the methodological section, the parents were instructed to return the completed questionnaires separately (using enclosed post-free envelopes). Even then the data might be biased, particularly because of the fact that it was the directors who passed the questionnaires to the parents. Thus the questionnaires might often have been given to parents who maintain close contact and are on good terms with the school.

kindergartens would differ from those in primary schools and these would in turn differ from those in basic schools. The following table (4) presents data necessary to carry out the comparison.

Table 4: The role of parents by the type of school

	Kindergarten		*Primary school*		*Basic school*	
Parents' role	N	Mean (%)	N	Mean (%)	N	Mean (%)
Customer (Client)	169	80	193	82	171	77
Problem (all together)	169	27	193	18	171	22
Problem – "independent"	169	42	193	22	171	27
Problem – "bad"	168	22	191	15	171	22
Problem – "eager"	168	16	191	15	171	16
Partner (all together)	169	41	191	39	171	33
Partner educational	169	57	191	54	171	47
Partner social	169	25	191	23	171	20
Citizen	169	24	191	17	170	14

The data distribution in the table suggests some interesting connections which are also confirmed by correlation analysis. In the case of the partnership model, the association is statistically significant (Cramer's V = 0.46, the significance level is 0.05). Parents are most likely to be perceived as partners in the environment of kindergartens, less frequently at primary schools, and least often at basic schools. This finding can be generalised to Czech society as a whole. It can thus be said that parents are perceived as partners significantly more often in Czech kindergartens than at basic schools and that the older a child is, the weaker is the partnership between the family and the school. This can be attributed to a variety of factors. The deepening distance between parents and teachers can result from the growing importance of grading, which is totally absent in kindergartens, for the child's further career. It can also be suggested that teachers at higher school levels are more often regarded as an authority and the parents are less likely to attempt to interfere with their work. Also, as the child grows older, parents loosen their supervision and reduce their time investments in the child's education.

In the case of the civic model, the pattern is similar: it is most likely to be found in kindergartens and least likely at basic schools (Cramer's V = 0.3, significance level is 0.007). It seems that the environment in kindergartens, and partially also at primary schools, is more open and thus has the potential to stimulate the parents to take civic action.

The model of parents as a problem is predominant also in kindergartens, particularly as an independent parent (42%), less strongly also at basic schools (27%). It is interesting that in the case of the model of problematic parents, we can identify a certain idyllic island at primary schools. Parents are seen as problematic somewhat more often in kindergartens and more often at basic schools.

The customer approach is most frequent at lower grades of basic schools. It can be said that our initial assumption that those models of parental roles which contain elements of co-operation and partnership will be more likely to predominate at lower school levels, has been confirmed. The parent-school relationship gets more complicated and "problematic" at higher school grades.

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Differences in the values of role indexes according to the size of locality (town or country):

Another objective factor that could affect the position of parents in relation to the school is the size of the town or village where the school is located. We proceed from the assumption that the school serves somewhat different functions and assumes a different position in relation to the public, including the parents, if it is the only school in a small village or if it is one of many in a larger town. In the former case, we assume relationships to be closer and more personal, approximating the partner model. In the latter case, on the contrary, we assume relationships to be more impersonal, reflecting, among other factors, the competitive environment amongst a number of schools. Here it is the client and the problematic role models that are more likely to occur. The following table summarises our research results.

Table 5: Parents' role by the size of locality (town or country)

	Country		*Town*	
Parents' role	N	Mean (%)	N	Mean (%)
Customer (Client)	252	77	281	82
Problem (all together)	252	21	281	22
Problem – „independent"	252	28	281	31
Problem – "bad"	250	20	280	19
Problem – "eager"	250	16	280	16
Partner (all together)	250	37	281	38
Partner educational	250	52	281	53
Partner social	250	22	281	23
Citizen	249	18	281	19

As can be seen, our assumption has been confirmed only in part. The customer principle is indeed more frequent at schools in larger towns (82%) than in the country (77%). The association is statistically significant at the 0.015 significance level (Cramer's V = 0.35). However, it is to a certain extent attributable to the inclusion of the indicator "parents chose our school on purpose" in the customer role index. This indicator is often irrelevant in the environment of small village schools. A vast majority of local children simply have to attend the school in their village.

A difference in favour of the towns was observed in the case of parents who demand information from the school. It appears that the actual absence or presence of a choice of schools generates further customer-like behaviour in the parents. As regards the remaining parental roles, the correlation is not significant; the only observation of note is that parents are perhaps somewhat more often perceived as problematic in urban schools because they tend to behave more independently in relation to the school (31% : 28%).

Differences in the values of role indexes according to satisfaction with co-operation:

It is possible to identify a range of other factors that influence the form of parental roles in relation to the school. Out of such "subjective" factors, we choose to focus on the parents' and the school representatives' satisfaction with their mutual co-operation. Therefore we included a corresponding question in the questionnaire and correlated individual parental roles with this

declared level of satisfaction. According to expectations, there is a significant correlation (Spearman coefficient = 0.48, the significance level is 0.0001) between satisfaction with co-operation and the model of parents as partners of the school. Such a strong correlation leads us to believe that satisfactory co-operation affects both the perception and self-perception of parents. The question remains, though, whether it is first necessary to change the schools' attitude towards the parents in order to initiate partnership, or whether the very partner-like activities might have the potential to incite a change of attitude towards the parents.

Parental roles in factor analysis:

Table 6: Factor analysis of parental roles (Varimax rotation)

		Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
C1	purposely choose the particular school for their child	0,124	-0,078	-0,120	**0,648**
C2	want the management to hire the best-qualified teachers	0,058	0,272	0,159	**0,539**
C3	insist that the school is obliged to provide them with information	0,029	0,194	0,380	**0,498**
C4	do not make effort to maintain communication with the school	-0,076	**-0,640**	0,034	0,196
C5	believe that extracurricular activities are more important for their children than academic homework.	0,170	**-0,516**	0,084	0,229
C6	believe that the family has greater influence on the child's educational progress than the school.	0,072	**-0,485**	0,259	0,253
C7	take no interest in their children's school results	-0,112	**-0,771**	0,165	-0,027
C8	take no interest in their children's behaviour at school	-0,135	**-0,756**	0,086	-0,221
C9	ignore the school's appeals to assist their children with homework and preparation for school.	-0,075	**-0,635**	0,183	-0,247
C10	provide the children with too much assistance with school duties	0,054	-0,242	**0,667**	0,052
C11	busy teachers and the school's management with trifles	0,191	-0,154	**0,651**	0,166
C12	overly criticise the performance of teachers and the school's management	-0,099	-0,162	**0,709**	-0,186
C13	like to exchange information with teachers about their child's personality, behaviour, and the best way to approach him/her	0,301	0,287	-0,023	**0,474**
C14	facilitate the child's school performance (give advice, create good conditions for study, etc.)	0,387	**0,453**	0,034	0,392
C15	are willing to help their child's classes	**0,585**	0,075	-0,065	0,355
C16	try to influence important decisions concerning the school	**0,605**	0,112	0,289	0,071
C17	get involved in formal parental networks at the school	**0,596**	0,076	0,060	0,065
C18	act in the interest of the school wherever it can be of benefit to the school	**0,768**	0,100	0,012	0,086
C19	will be interested in the school even after their child completes his/her education	**0,679**	0,150	-0,007	-0,037
C20	would appreciate if the school served also served purposes other than mere education of children	**0,490**	0,010	0,073	-0,003
C21	emphasise the importance of civic education at school	**0,514**	-0,177	-0,139	0,395

Legend: C1 – C3: Parents as „customers", C4 – 6: Parents as a problem – "independent" parents, C7 – C9: Parents as a problem – "bad" parents, C10 – C12: Parents as a problem – "eager" parents, C13 – C15: Parents as educational partners, C16 – C18: Parents as social partners, C19 – C21: Parents as citizens.

Our research design is based on theoretical concepts of parental roles in relation to schools. As already noted, the research indicators are derived from the characteristics of the four most frequently mentioned models of parental roles: the problematic, customer, partner and civic models. With the use of factor analysis, these theoretical concepts, taken mostly from international literature, are confronted in this section with empirical data obtained from a random sample of Czech kindergartens and basic schools.

The factor analysis identified four factors, which do not quite match the original theoretical models. In other words, the resulting factors, which reflect the situation in Czech schools, are saturated with somewhat different items[11], as can be seen from the previous table.

Factor 1 is clearly composed of two indexes; the indexes for parents as social partners (C16 – C18) and as citizens (C19 – C21). They are complemented with one item – C15 (parents are willing to help their child's class) from index for parents as educational partners. All items of this factor have a common denominator in the social interest in the school, or at least in the class. All of them are characterised by some degree of the parents' active involvement in matters related to schooling generally, not only in schooling of the own child. Therefore we suggest labelling this factor as **parents as social partners**.

Factor 2 consists of two indexes: the index for problematic parents perceived as "bad" (C4 – C6) and those seen as "independent" (C7 – C9). From the index for parents as educational partners is one item here (C14 – parents facilitate the child's school performance) but with opposite sign. This means that the parents who are not concerned about their children's school results and behaviour fall in the same category as those who show a certain degree of distrust of the school, do not take extra effort to maintain contacts with the school, and/or seek alternative ways of encouraging their children's development. We suggest labelling this factor **non-communicative parents**.

Factor 3 contains only one index: that for parents seen as problematic because of their over-eagerness (C10 – C12). These parents constitute a problem for the school because they can be slightly troublesome, often busying the teachers with trifles and being overly critical. They can certainly never be suspected of taking no interest in their child's study or in the school. On the contrary, the difficulties lie rather in the fact that they tend to choose negative ways of communication. We suggest labelling this factor **(overly) active parents**.

Factor 4 consists mainly of one index: the index for parents as customers (C1 – C3) and, somewhat less significantly, one item (C13 – parents like to exchange information with teachers about their child's personality, behaviour, and the best way to approach him/her) from the index for parents as educational partners. It seems that the concepts of client relationship and educational partnership are related to one another. This could perhaps be attributed to the combination of the possibility to freely choose a school for the children (which is the central principle of customer relationships) with the school's accent on communication and information exchange (which forms the basis of the principle both of client relationship and educational partnership). However, this is where the parents' initiative stops. It is unusual for the parents themselves to actively seek a change or engage in fundamental matters concerning the school,

[11] From the methodological perspective, it is satisfactory that, with the exception of items C13 to C15, the resulting factors did not cut across the proposed role indexes.

characteristics typical of social partnership. It is difficult to find an adequate label for this factor – we suggest calling it **parents as educational clients**.

IV. Summary of results

The question what role is ascribed to Czech parents in relation to the school can be answered in a fairly straightforward way. It is the customer type of role. Much less frequent are the roles of a partner and a "problem", least frequent is the role of a citizen. It is interesting that there is hardly any difference between the school representatives' perception of the parents and the parents' own self-perception. Under our new labels for parents' roles is most frequent factor 4 (parents as educational clients – 75%), than factor 2 (non-communicative parents – 29%), factor 1 (parents as social partners – 23%) and the last one is factor 3 (overly active parents – 16%).

Clear differences in the role perceptions are identified according to the type of school. The higher the school grade (year of study), the less frequent is the partner and civic approach. It is also worth noting that it is at the first level of basic schools where parents are seen as least problematic.

The size of locality correlates only with the customer model. The customer approach is found more often in towns where parents are free to deliberately choose a school than in villages.

Factor analysis shows that the theoretical concepts of parental roles, taken from international literature, do not precisely match the Czech educational environment. This is particularly obvious in the case of the category of parents as a "problem", which broke into two independent factors. The first consists of the "bad" and the "independent" parent, those who do not really embrace the school's goals, be it because of lack of interest or by distrust of these goals. The second one corresponds with the "eager" parent who, on the contrary, tends to have excessive requirements of the school. These two newly identified parental roles are labelled as "non-communicative parents" and "(overly) active parents". The first factor, labelled as "parents as social partners", is clearly defined, though only a small proportion of parents falls under this category, as is evident from the descriptive statistics above. With regards to the number of cases, the fourth factor is most important: "parents as educational clients".

It seems that this is the point at which the parental involvement with schools froze in the Czech environment.

V. Discussion

This study aspires to approach the issue of parental roles in relation to the school in a way that has not so far been tested in the Czech environment[12]. There are certain limitations in the chosen methodology of indicators construction on the basis of individual parental roles characteristics and their subsequent operationalisation into questionnaire items intended for representatives of schools and parents. Nonetheless, we consider it a legitimate approach to the empirical analysis of the topic.

[12] To our knowledge, no similar research has been carried out abroad either.

In fact, the topic has so far been confined to the realm of mere speculation in the Czech Republic. Many teachers and schools' directors are very likely to maintain that they approach parents as partners or clients, without being able to distinguish between individual dimensions of the parental roles. Not even the analysis of the relevant legislation, which we carried out last year (Rabušicová, Zounek, 2001), gives a clear definition of the role of parents in the Czech educational system. Parents are occasionally perceived preventively as a problem in the documents and in other places as customers who have the right – though it is often difficult to exercise – to freely choose a school. Yet elsewhere in the documents they are perceived as citizens who have the right to comment on the functioning of public institutions and to establish organisations in order to support the school. Indeed, the partner role is only embraced in the visions of the Czech White Paper.

We believe that our results shed a brighter light on the topic.

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